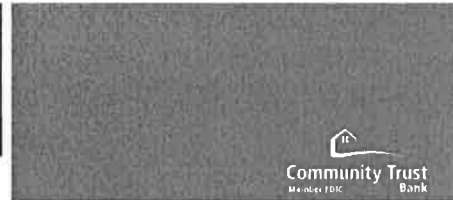


Congress  
SE Northeast

LOGIN



## TOUGH REDISTRICTING JOB AHEAD

in

Loss of one congressional seat a result of low population growth in state

T. Scott Boatright

Recent figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau show that Louisiana has grown as a state. But apparently the state is not growing fast enough.

Figures released Tuesday showed Louisiana with a 1.4 percent population increase up to 4,533,372. But based on those figures compared with those from other states, Louisiana will lose one of its seven congressional seats.

State Rep. Rick Gallot, chairman of the House committee that deals with redistricting, saw those numbers coming and announced on Monday that enough lawmakers have signed a petition to call for a special legislative session in March to redraw Louisiana's political district lines. The session will begin March 20 and could last until April 13.

"The upside to the numbers is that we didn't fall in population as compared to the 2000 Census," said Gallot, D-Grain. "We're actually up 64,000 people. After the hurricanes that have devastated the state the past decade, I was concerned those numbers could have been worse."

"But there's a downside, too. We're losing a congressional seat. People ask how that could happen when we've experienced population growth, even though it's slight. Other states have seen growth as high as 15-20 percent. Louisiana didn't keep that kind of pace, and that's why we're losing a seat."

Complete census figures are expected to be released in February.

Gallot said state lawmakers will be looking for public guidance when they look to begin the redistricting process.

"It's more important than ever to get public opinion — feedback — as we start redistricting," Gallot said. "There's a portion of our website dedicated to it. And we'll hold public meetings throughout the state to get public input. There will be a meeting in Shreveport on Feb. 28 and in Monroe on March 1."

Gallot said that many different proposals and scenarios will be looked at while considering redistricting.

"Last week the idea of a coastal district in southwest Louisiana was floated around," Gallot said. "Some of the legislators from that part of the state feel that because parishes in that part of the state have so many issues in common, like hurricane protection and erosion, that a district stretching across the bottom of the state is needed."

"You have to consider all proposals. As chairman, I feel I have to take a 'big picture' approach at looking at things as we begin this project. I want to look at everything from every angle before we make any decisions."

Other lawmakers are arguing to merge north Louisiana parishes — which are split between two congressional districts — into one district that contains both Monroe and Shreveport. The chairman of the Senate redistricting committee, Sen. Bob Kostelka, R-Monroe, has said he objects to such a plan, however, because he feels constituents on both sides of the northern part of the state would not be properly represented.

Gallot knows the redistricting won't come easy.

"It will affect everyone," Gallot said. "Last time we redistricted, we were looking to come up with a size of 638,000 (constituents) per district. Now we're looking to try to make it around 755,000 (constituents per district)."

"What complicates things even more is population loss in the delta region — places around Lake Providence. That district, which is high in minorities, already starts out behind because of its population loss. Those are the kinds of factors that will make this redistricting process a tough one."

Experience could be another hurdle facing the redistricting session, which will mark the first time Louisiana lawmakers have called a special session.

"Only two of 19 committee members have been through (redistricting)," Gallot said. "Only 12 out of 105 members in the House have done it. That's a lot of first timers. But I'm confident we'll get it done. It'll take some work, but we're going to try to do what's best for everyone in Louisiana."

"That's because if we don't do it, the court will step in and do it for us."

SHARE - (<http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=xa-4b7c4e34529e1048>)

Rick Gallot



**Tough redistricting job ahead | Ruston Daily Leader**  
rustonleader.com

Recent figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau show that Louisiana has grown as a state. But apparently the state is not growing fast enough.

about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share



**Mike Stagg** If African Americans continue to make up about 1/3 of the state's population, that should translate into about two of our six congressional districts having African Americans at or near majority, no?

about an hour ago · Like



**Millie Atkins** I can certainly see how this will be a difficult decision. The outcome has to be a win-win for every area of our state.  
54 minutes ago · Like

Write a comment...

